

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 14:23-29

You probably hear these words almost every Sunday, “May the peace of Christ which surpasses all human understanding keep your hearts and minds ....” How many times have you said in your heart, “If only it could be true” as you hear these words meant to give great comfort? In today’s passage, Jesus speaks to the disciples about that peace that His presence can bring into our hearts.

As Jesus spoke to these men, what was in their future? When Jesus said to them that they would not need to fear, He was preparing them to face His death on the cross. These men who believed in their hearts that eventually Jesus would throw the Romans out of Israel and restore the monarchy. These men, who heard words of reassurance from Jesus’ own lips would cower in fear after His death. They would be leaderless, hunted men who didn’t have an inkling about the Resurrection until after it happened! At that time in their lives they would know great fear, but after the Resurrection, all of the surviving eleven, (except John who lived to be an old man), would have the courage to endure execution for their belief in Jesus.

If even the disciples could experience great fear, what is the key to knowing peace? The disciples’ fear came at a time when they believed that Jesus had left them. They lost the assurance of His word that He would be with them, even though they would not see Him. Isn’t that when we also fall victim to fear? Sometimes we drift in our faith until suddenly we realize that we can’t see Jesus! He is still there, but we have turned away, relying upon our own power and wisdom. We are blessed because Jesus never leaves us, even when we lose track of Him. We are like the little child in a large store who is wandering around, wondering at the sights who suddenly realizes that he doesn’t see Mom! He panics and turns to flee, only to run smack into Mom’s knees. Jesus indeed is always there, offering us true peace. We just need to keep our lives focused on His presence.

*Is God’s Word a daily part of your life?*

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 14:23-29

1. According to Jesus’ teaching what is the relationship between love and obedience?

2. Jesus speaks of going away and coming back. When did He go away? When did He come back? When will He come back again?

3. In what sense is the Father greater than the Son (vs. 28)?

4. How is the peace that Jesus offers (vs. 27) different from the peace that the world gives?

5. What fears do you have? What troubles you? How can Jesus’ words (vs. 27) help you?

6. According to these verses what is the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?



## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22-31

Last week we talked a little about whether Christians were still meant to be out there upsetting the world. In looking at today's passage you may notice that the "world" of our day really isn't so different from the one confronting Paul. We may travel by air and automobile, and we may watch television and DVD movies, but does our world really think much differently from the one of two thousand years ago?

Just before today's passage, verse 16 says that Paul was "greatly distressed" as he viewed the city full of idols. That sounds like a feeling that many Christians experience today. The Athenians called him an "idle babbler," a term that may not be exactly applied to Christians today, but we get the idea. They also said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities." It even sounds like our culture when the passage says, "Now all the Athenians...used to spend their time in ...telling or hearing something new."

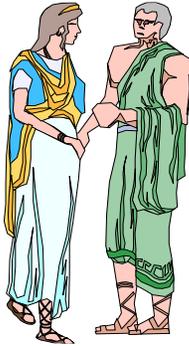
As Paul found himself in the midst of these pagan curiosity seekers, how did he respond? Interestingly, he did not go on the attack. There is an old phrase in evangelism circles, "meet them where they are at," and Paul did that very well. He began, "I observe that you are very religious in all respects." Isn't that true of our own society?

Our culture has become more and more religious in recent decades, but not more Christian. It isn't that our society rejects God as much as it just doesn't understand Him. The world pretty much does accept the supernatural and the idea of God, but also believes that any religion is just fine and all will take the believer to whatever ideal of eternity he or she wishes. It was the same with Paul's audience.

It has been observed that Christians today tend to attack the world with the Law, while Jesus and His followers attacked it with the Gospel. Paul was a master at loving people into the Kingdom. Did it work? Our passage says, "...some began to sneer....some men joined him and believed...." Some will always sneer, even on the day of Jesus' return, but what about the ones who are waiting to hear and waiting to believe?

**Ask for a Bible study about Paul at your church!**

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)



## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22-31

1. What is the setting and context of Paul's message? (Acts 17:16-21)
2. Paul gets the attention of the audience with a general reference. To what object does he refer? How does he appeal to their knowledge and curiosity?
3. Paul gets specific. What does he teach about the only true God? How is the message applicable to the audience?
4. Is ignorance an excuse when it come to spiritual matters? (vs. 30-31)
5. What comfort and assurance do the words of verse 27 have for you?
6. Some would suggest that worship of any god is adequate and that it is enough simply to be "spiritual" or "religious." How does this text address those attitudes?



## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 11:19-30

So, what was Antioch? More than you might think. Only Rome and Alexandria were larger cities in the Roman Empire. It was one of the earliest planned cities and a center of commercial and trade operations in the empire. Rome encouraged the Jews to settle there and granted them full Roman citizenship if they did so. Needless to say, by the time of Paul there was a large Jewish community in the city. The city stretched nearly two miles north and south along a large river leading to the sea and almost a mile from east to west. There were all kinds of people there and all manner of false gods, false worship, and decidedly immoral religious rites and forms of entertainment. There were people of wealth and poverty, intelligence and ignorance. It was a city known for its culture and also its revolts. So, why all the detail about an ancient city?? Archaeologists have also unearthed more than twenty churches within the city. One historian says that “Apart from Jerusalem itself, no other city was so intimately connected with the beginnings of Christianity.”

Antioch was very much like our own cities. Today many churches run from our large cities. Sometimes even we as individuals think of the sin and stubbornness of many citizens who choose to live in large metropolitan areas and we just give up, but the early Christians just didn't seem to have a word for “hopeless”. Paul based his missionary life at Antioch. The churches there sent out the first foreign missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, and they were among the first to send aid to their fellow churches. The furor that Christianity brought challenged every citizen. Christians (perhaps first named in Antioch as a sarcasm) discovered that they needed to stand for what they believed in the midst of a crazy mixture of people. In order to make the love of Jesus real, they had to live it day to day. And it worked!

When we become discouraged in our attempts to share the love of Christ with the full and changing culture around us, maybe we can remember the Christians of Antioch, who were convinced that their Lord would overcome any obstacle facing them with His love.

**Ask for a Bible study about Barnabas and Paul at your church!**  
(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 11:19-30

1. What means did God use to bring the message of the resurrection to Antioch (vs. 19)? Refer to Bible maps the early church and of Paul's missionary journeys to find this significant mission location.



2. Who was Barnabas? How is he described in vs. 24?
3. What is the significance of the last sentence in vs. 26? What does it mean to you to be called a “Christian?”
4. What was the message of Agabus (vs. 28)? What was the gift of Agabus? (see Acts 21:10-11) How was this gift a blessing to the early church?
5. What is the stewardship example of vs. 29-30? What is the lesson for us?
6. Barnabas saw “the evidence of the grace of God.” Where do you see the evidence of God's grace in your life? In your church?

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:8-18

Have you ever noticed how much people enjoy worshipping man-built gods? Even Paul and Barnabas found themselves set apart as gods by the people of Lystra. They proclaimed them Zeus and Hermes. Now, even Zeus and Hermes were quite human. You may remember from classes in school that the Greek and Roman gods were filled with all of the failings of their human flock; jealousy, murder, cruelty, revenge, and pride all mingled with their occasional bursts of kindness or justice. In the case of Lystra, there was a legend that the gods had been slighted long ago by a nearby town, resulting in catastrophe, and the people showered worship on Paul and Barnabas out of fear that the same thing might happen again!



Like many today, the people of Lystra missed the message about the true God who created everything and provided everything, and they instead pursued their own assumptions and wisdom. The Bible says that the best of the wisdom of men is only foolishness in comparison to God's wisdom, and this story is an example of the truth of that statement.

We have an almighty God who demonstrates His love and care for us in the very creation in which we live. Yet, many worship, in one form or another, the creation instead of the Creator. Our God provides our every need every day, but many worship their own ability to provide their needs and wants, praising themselves instead of God. Our Lord provides life, both abundant and eternal, yet there are those who believe that even in this they can be their own gods. Assisted suicide, euthanasia, abortion, and even cryogenic freezing of the dead, are all marks of a person who has created his or her own god of life.

Is God your God for everything? Have you left behind all of the other "gods" that people create to supplant the true God? It's not an easy task. After all, we are sinful by nature and enjoy pursuing gods that we feel we can control. The good news is that God forgives us for this through the risen Lord Jesus. He does not leave us alone in our struggle against our little man-built gods. He grants us the wisdom and faith to follow only Him. We need only ask.

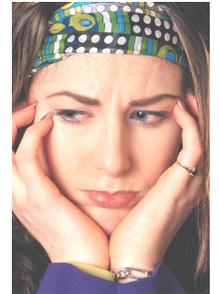
***Ask for a Bible study about Paul at your church!***

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:8-18

1. What effect did the miracle have on the lame man? What effect did the miracle have on the crowd of witnesses?
2. From their response, what do we know about the religious life of the people of Lystra? What had influenced their beliefs?
3. With what words in vs. 15 do "Paul and Barnabas" put the miracle in perspective?
4. With what evidences of the "living God" do the Apostles begin their witness? Did the crowd make the transition?
5. Most in our culture would not identify Greek gods and goddesses as sources of rescue. What more contemporary "gods" are worshipped in our time and our settings?
6. How do we see evidences of the "living God" (vs. 15) in nature and in our every day life? How do we use those evidences to make the transition to the message of the fuller life in a resurrected Jesus?



## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22-31

Athens had been home to the great philosophers of Greece—men like Socrates, Plato, Zeno, Epicurus, Aristotle, and Sophocles. Though these were gone, their shadows remained (verse 21). As to the city “full of idols,” a writer named Petronius said that it was easier to meet a god than a man in Athens. There were more statues to the gods there than in all the rest of Greece combined.

Paul walked the streets of Athens and was among those headed for the huge marketplace. The shoppers were only part of the noise and crowded bustle of the place. There were also groups of men standing here and there postulating as to the meaning of life, the place of the gods, and mankind’s path in the world. While some might have looked on the sight and cursed the world for its ignorance and godlessness, Paul also saw people who were loved by his Lord and who needed to know His salvation.

Paul’s position was precarious as he stood before the group of scholars on Mars Hill. The Epicureans and Stoics who interviewed him were part of a council that oversaw religion and education in the city. Although much of the power of the group had diminished, it was this body that had condemned Socrates many years before.

But, Paul was not one to remain silent when it came to proclaiming the cross and empty tomb. He strode up to the group, relying on the Holy Spirit to fill him with the needed words.

The statue to the Unknown God caught his eye and Paul knew what to do. (The statue had been erected by the city so that no “unknown” god might be offended by the lack of his image among the statues lining the streets.)

Paul did not condemn the council’s idol worship or their false philosophies. Instead he preached to them of this “Unknown God.” An important concern in our churches today is still “meeting people where they are at”, and St. Paul would agree. That is exactly what he did when he shared Jesus with the council. Verse 34 shares how the Spirit blessed Paul’s witness.

**Learn more about God’s mercy and love in a Bible study this week.**

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.*

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22-31

### Exploring The Text:

1. Did the people of Athens know a lot about the true God? How does Paul introduce them to the true God?
2. Is it enough to know about the God of creation? How (and where) does Paul share the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection?
3. Does ignorance of God excuse us from God’s judgment? (vs. 30-31)

### Family Table Talks:

4. How would you begin explaining God to someone who knows nothing about Him?
5. Is it enough to just be “religious”?
6. Read Acts 17:28. To what extent is God part of everything that we do?

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

1 John 4:1-11

We live in a world of many religions, all of which demand to be recognized as valid; all of which demand to be confirmed; all of which demand to be recognized as equal to Christianity. Some Christians seem to be willing to accede to these demands, but should we? John reminds us today that Jesus Himself stated that He alone is the Way to God; He alone is the means by which man may become righteous. John goes so far as to say of the spirits leading those who deny Christ, "...every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist..." Lest we be fooled by the claims of some of the world's false religions, confessing Jesus does not mean acknowledging that He lived or that He was a mighty prophet. It does not mean confessing that He was a caring humanitarian. It does not even mean confessing that He was a man who God used to show Himself to the world. Confessing Christ means confessing that He alone is the Son of God, God and Man together in one Being, only Savior of the world, only resurrected One, and only path to God.

John goes on to say that we are of God and "He who is in us is greater than he [Satan] who is in the world." That means that we do not have to fear the false religions and false messiahs in the world. They cannot steal God from us. Nor can they take us away from God. God allows nothing to touch us that would try to rip us from His arms. Last week we talked about abiding in God. He also steadfastly abides in us. The Holy Spirit strengthens us to not only resist the temptations presented by the religions of the world but to stand as witnesses to the truth. Because of God, we can stand firmly, declaring the truth about Jesus the Christ, the Savior of the world—and demonstrate that truth by our love. Because God has loved us, we can show great love for one another and also show great love for those lost in a false faith as we tell them about the true Savior who wants them as His own.

Learn more about God's mercy and love in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

1 John 4:1-11

1. What two spirits are described in verse 6? What are the messages of each spirit? What are the sources of each spirit?
2. How does John define "love"? (vs. 10) How does John define the essence of God? (vs. 8)
3. How do we recognize the truth in a world of spiritual lies? (vs. 2-3)
4. Do we have to fear false spirits or their message? Do we have any reason to doubt our status in God's family? Why not? (vs. 4)

### For Family Reflection

5. What false spirits are working in our world? How do we recognize them? What dangers do they present to our family and to our church?
6. "Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (vs. 11) What does this passage mean for your family? How do we show God's love to our spouse, child, parent, sibling, etc.?

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27

What a description of the new Jerusalem! If you read verses 15-26, you can picture the grandness of even the building stones that John saw in his vision. His account is filled with symbolism (a mark of the writing style called “apocalyptic”), so there are many interpretations of the city that John saw in the revelation. However, looking past the details and at the city as a whole, we see some unarguable truths.

In God’s city there will be no darkness because the glory of God will provide its light. God’s glory is something we don’t often think about. We are more familiar with His mercy and grace. We see a preview of the Son’s glory in the Transfiguration, but God’s glory as we will see it in heaven is something that we cannot begin to imagine.

God’s city will be beyond our grasp in its beauty. John lists the precious metals and stones that he saw in its construction in an effort to convey its beauty to us—it boggled even his imagination. John was shown what he could understand—what we see in reality will be even greater.

There will be no evil in God’s city. The gates will be open all the time, yet no evil will enter. Peace will reign, and we will see what the Old Testament prophets foresaw. There will be peace between the mighty and the weak, and there will be no war.

John is told that there will be constant activity in the city. Many will come to see God and bring Him their worship. Can you imagine? We will be living with God, who will reside in His city.

Will God drop a literal city into our world? Will He be in literal residence there? Will we call His city the new Jerusalem? That it will be wonderful we cannot doubt, but even greater than imagining what the new Jerusalem may really be like, is the assurance that we will be there to experience it!

When Jesus came to us, His creation, He did so in love. He walked to the cross so that His death could free us from sin. He rose so that we may live a new life right now as His children and as His servants here. And we get a bonus—He has already written our names into “the Lamb’s book of life.” We will live in God’s city.

Learn more about God’s city in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27

1. What Biblical number is introduced in this text? (vs. 12, 14, 21) What is the significance and symbolism of this number?
2. How is this “holy city” physically different from any city on earth? How are the residents different from any earthly city?
3. Why doesn’t this city need any form of physical light? Who is the Light? (See John 8:12; Matthew 5:14-16)
4. Describe the “Lamb’s book of life.” (vs. 27) Who holds the book? Whose names are in the book? How do names get added to the book?

### For Family Reflection

5. A family project idea: Try to illustrate this description of heaven (painting, drawing, sculpture, etc.). Contrast the “old” city with the “new” city.
6. Who is the Lamb who is in the city? What is the difference between the Lamb of the Lenten season and the Lamb of the Easter season?

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 14:15-21

Jesus continues instructing His disciples shortly before His arrest at Gethsemane. In this passage Jesus talks about the importance of living by His commandments.

Jesus says, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” Jesus instructs obedience, not to the manipulations of the law added by the Pharisees over the centuries, but obedience to the true commands given by God. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus had replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” He added that the second greatest commandment was, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37,39). Earlier in the evening, Jesus had told the disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you...all men will know you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:34-35).

His words are so simple, yet so hard. If I make the words a priority in my heart and life, what happens to me? What will happen to hate, greed, pride, envy, spite, selfish anger, adultery, lying, etc., etc.? They may no longer be part of my life. Love may even require me to admonish my fellow believer or friend. Even scarier, it may require me to hold a friend who is hurting, or listen to a stranger’s fears and offer comfort. This wondrous change that might take place in me is not for my own salvation, but for the glory of God and the growth of His Kingdom.

Along with His command, Jesus promises help. “...I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever...” As promised, whatever we do that is pleasing in God’s eyes, is not only inspired, but enabled by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, sent to live within us.

Learn more about walking with Jesus in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee.*

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 14:15-21

1. Jesus would physically be with the disciples for just a short time. Who would be with them forever?
2. According to vs.15 and 21 how do we prove our love for Jesus? Do our deeds of love gain His love?
3. Jesus said “I will come to you” (vs. 18) and “you will see me” (vs. 19). When would these promises be fulfilled?

### For Family Reflection

4. What is the Holy Spirit’s (Counselor; Spirit of truth) role in your life? Read Luther’s Explanation to The Third Article.
5. What do Jesus’ words “I will not leave you as orphans” (vs. 18) mean to you?
6. What do Jesus’ words “Because I live, you also will live” (vs. 19) mean to you? How are these Easter words?

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 15:9-17

In last week's passage, Jesus talked about "abiding," or remaining, or living, in Him. This week, He says, "abide in My love." He says, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." That command is almost as humbling as the words that our Lord taught us to pray, "...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Who can meet such a command? But, knowing that we cannot follow Jesus' command perfectly should not stop us from trying to understand God's definition of loving one another.

Jesus says that His disciples are no longer slaves, but His friends. Some people would almost call His version of friendship "slavery." That's because we don't understand friendship beyond the "I'll do something for you if you'll do something for me" concept. Jesus says that a friend will lay down his life for a friend. That is God's version of friendship.

Only Jesus can say to His friends, "You are My friends, if you do what I command you." He can say this because only He is the ultimate Friend. Anything that He would command us to do would be for our well being and our happiness. Even as we live in Him, we can't comprehend a friendship like that. Jesus is the Friend Who was willing to die for each one of us. St. Paul says, "...perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die" but that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:7-8)

Our encouragement from Jesus is that we did not have to be His friends before He became ours. He pursued us. He chose us, in spite of our sin. He cleansed us through the Cross and assured us through His Resurrection. This Friend says to us, "This I command you, that you love one another."

*Learn more about what love is by studying God's Word daily.*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 15:9-17

1. What is Jesus' command to His followers? How did Jesus demonstrate what He commanded?
2. How does vs. 16 address the suggestion that we choose to follow Jesus? When did God choose you to be His child?
3. What the difference between a friend and a servant? What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus?

### For Family Reflection

4. Read I John 3:16 and I John 4:7-7-12. How do these verses support John 15:13? What does it mean to love as Jesus loved us?
5. Is there joy in following Jesus? (vs. 11) How do we keep the joy of Easter going in our life, our home, and our church?
6. Read (and perhaps sing) "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." (LSB #770) Say a prayer thanking Jesus for choosing you to be His friend.

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 16:23-33

In this passage Jesus explains that once His mission is accomplished His followers will be able to communicate with His Father directly. The cost of the sin that had kept them from the presence of God would be paid. Verse 26 states that we can approach the Father directly, not because of our goodness, but because we belong to Jesus. His work opened the door and tore the curtain to the holy of holies on the day of His crucifixion.

The disciples reply that now they understand. They are relieved that now there will be no more confusion. But confusion would return. Jesus tells them that they will scatter at His arrest, leaving Him alone to face the authorities.

Christians today experience times when we have no doubt, no questions; we just have peace. At those times we want to believe that doubt, fear, and pain will not return, but they do. We are still sinners. We are still rebels. We still, deep inside, will try to be God in our own lives.

As this passage concludes, Jesus gives us words that can carry us through the times of doubt and fear; times when our brains know the truth, but our emotions take over. Jesus said that though the disciples would leave Him, He would not be alone because “the Father is with Me.” He followed with “...in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulations, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (vs. 32 & 33).

His words are true today. They are words to memorize. Even though we can’t always “feel” like God is in control, He is.

Just think about it for a few minutes: Jesus has overcome the world; as He was never alone, we are never alone. God really is in control, even when our country is changing, our lives are changing, our relationships or health are suffering, God is in control of the outcome of it all.

Just as the Holy Spirit brought the right words and faith to the early Christians, He does the same for us. However, we do control which way we will turn—will we listen to Him and turn to Him for the truth, or turn inward, giving in to our doubts and fears?

***Get to know your Father. Join a Bible study group.***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 16:23-33

1. How would the disciples’ relationship with Jesus and with the Father change after Jesus’ resurrection? How would their prayer life be different?
2. Did the disciples fully understand Jesus’ words (vs. 29-31)? What is the danger of assuming “now I get it!”?
3. How were Jesus’ words in vs. 32 fulfilled? In spite of their abandonment, what confidence does Jesus express? What similar confidence is ours?
4. How might Jesus’ words “In this world you will have tribulation,” be discouraging to the disciples and to us? What good news does Jesus have for them and for us?

### For Family Reflection

5. What does Jesus’ promise “Ask and you will receive” (vs. 24) mean for our prayer life? Will Jesus always give us everything we ask for?
6. Is your joy “full” (vs. 24)? What special joys have been part of your life and your family during this Easter season? How have you shared your joy in Jesus with others?